INL News Release
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New degrees prepare students for high demand energy jobs

POCATELLO – Idaho National Laboratory and Idaho State University have teamed to develop two new energy degree programs that specifically train students in mechanical engineering technology and wind power generation fields. The Energy Systems Mechanical Engineering Technology and Energy Systems Wind Energy Technician programs will be available for the fall 2009 semester.

Both programs are accredited, two-year Associate of Applied Science degrees, and are part of ISU's Energy Systems Technology Education Center (ESTEC), a partnership with Idaho National Laboratory and Partners for Prosperity.

The Energy Systems Mechanical Engineering Technology degree program will prepare students for employment as mechanical engineering technicians in electrical power generation fields including nuclear, coal, gas and renewable technologies. The Energy Systems Wind Engineering Technology program focuses primarily on regulations and standards that pertain to the construction and maintenance of wind turbines.

ESTEC was created in 2007 with grants from the U.S. Department of Labor and the National Science Foundation to address the growing need for technicians within the U.S. energy sector. Energy is a high-growth industry and the demand for trained technicians dramatically increases as existing employees retire and as new generating facilities are constructed.

To meet this demand, ESTEC is offering students unique opportunities to develop skills specific to the energy industry. Graduates have the ability to construct, install, maintain, calibrate, troubleshoot and repair energy-related systems.

ESTEC now has four energy system programs and plans to add a nuclear operations degree in January and hydroelectric and geothermal degrees in upcoming years.

ESTEC represents the only educational program within 500 miles of eastern Idaho with the capacity to specifically educate students for this type of employment. "The center offers a distinctive element of hands-on training you can't get anywhere else," said Richard Holman, deputy director of the Energy Systems Technology and Education Center and INL manager of Energy Workforce Initiatives.

"From an industry perspective, we see an urgent need for technicians to support the electric power industry in America," said Vern Porter, Idaho Power's general manager for power production. "ESTEC will help meet this growing need for technicians."

ESTEC graduates are qualifying for jobs throughout the United States, but most are finding employment within the Pacific Northwest. Several companies including Idaho Power, PacifiCorp, Entergy Corporation and Siemens are working with ESTEC to place students in mid-degree internships and ultimately into careers.

11 ESTEC students graduated in May and ESTEC placed 100 percent of last year's graduates in jobs directly related to their training. Their salaries ranged from $50,000 to $70,000 annually.

"ESTEC is an initiative that has exceeded our wildest expectations," Holman said.

ESTEC's partners helped contribute to its success. INL is one of the U.S. Department of Energy's technology research centers. It provides ESTEC instructional materials, program implementation support, planning services, speakers, grant development and support, scholarships and internships.

Partners for Prosperity is a non-profit 501(c)(3) funded by the Northwest Area Foundation to reduce poverty in the 16 eastern Idaho counties. It helps recruit adults currently in need of additional training, including incumbent workers, unemployed or underemployed individuals, displaced homemakers, single parents and workers from declining industries.

INL is one of the DOE's 10 multiprogram national laboratories. The laboratory performs work in each of DOE's strategic goal areas: energy, national security, science and environment. INL is the nation's leading center for nuclear energy research and development. Day-to-day management and operation of the laboratory is the responsibility of Battelle Energy Alliance.

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